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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRC TELEVISION COVERAGE  
OF PRESIDENT NIXON'S TRIP

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The published [redacted] reports on broadcast, press, and television coverage of the President's China visit provided a comprehensive view of Peking's propaganda treatment of the event. China analysts would probably have gained few further important insights on that score from actually viewing the videotapes of PRC television coverage of the trip. A viewing of the videotapes does, however, afford insights into the potential for future profitable systematic exploitation of the television medium when monitoring techniques and analytic expertise have been developed and refined.

FOIAb3b1 [redacted] Special Memorandum of 2 March 1972 on "Foreign Radio and Press Reaction to President Nixon's Trip to China" and [redacted] of 1 and 8 March said, in a concise and accurate fashion, about all that could meaningfully be said about the available PRC TV coverage. Essentially, these reports examined the available information on TV coverage within the same basic terms of reference that were used for examination of radio and press coverage--noting, for example, significant juxtapositions of film clips, replays calculated to underscore a particular point, and scope of coverage.

A thorough analysis of television coverage alone would be seriously handicapped at this juncture by the absence of background data on the behavior of this relatively new medium in the PRC and in general by the absence of the kind of extensive frame of reference that is available for systematic study of the radio and press. Viewing of PRC television coverage of this single event does, however, leave the viewer with some interesting impressions:

- + The Chinese people saw, on balance, as complete a chronicle of the President's visit as was seen in the United States. The film and accompanying commentary were presented in a factual, straightforward manner with no obvious propagandistic exploitation.
- + The Chinese viewer, in fact, saw more thorough coverage of some aspects of the visit than did the American. He got a much better view of the principals than was presented to his American counterpart.
- + The Chinese used film--there was no live coverage--and this allowed them to edit out extraneous material. It also, of course, allowed them to be as selective as they wished. Notably, the monitored PRC telecasts did not include the

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scenes of President Nixon meeting ordinary Chinese citizens-- scenes that were criticized here as having been rigged by the hosts. Coverage lagged about 24 hours behind actual events.

SOME SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS:

A two-minute film of the President's meeting with Mao Tse-tung, telecast by Canton television at 1030 GMT on 22 February, was the first TV news coverage of the President's trip. The Chinese viewer was thus informed of the importance ascribed to the visit. The newscast continued with films of the President's arrival at Peking airport, the welcoming dinner, and the first meeting between the President and Chou En-lai. This sequence was broadcast only once, while on subsequent days the reports of the President's trip were repeated later in the evening. After the President's departure for the United States, PRC television reran much of the original coverage of the trip.\*

The Chinese film crews had better vantage points than the American television cameras. Most of the Chinese coverage consisted of close-up and medium shots. The viewer had the impression of being right in the middle of the event. The close-ups did not allow the viewer to see much around the periphery of the main action. There were cut-away reaction shots at the banquets, the opera, and the sports events but not at the airport ceremonies. There were numerous close-up shots of extended duration showing American and Chinese leaders. A study of these shots as the trip progressed proved of interest: The strain of the visit was obvious particularly on Chou En-lai's face--he looked tired and drawn--at the President's departure from Shanghai. There were shots at the banquets of Chinese leaders placing food on the plates of Secretary of State William Rogers and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. Almost every shot conveyed a pleasant, cordial mood.

The commentary was sparse.\*\* Each segment began with a Chinese headline on the screen. Documentary music was constantly in the

\* Detailed information on the reruns was disseminated in editorial  
FOIA b3b1  
FOIA b3b1 in [REDACTED]

See also a  
discussion of the reruns in [REDACTED]

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\*\* A billboard of shots and a complete commentary translation of all  
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FOIA b3b1 PRC television coverage was carried in [REDACTED]

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background. A female announcer would specify the date and the event, followed by the line-up of who attended from each side. After President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers was listed first, then Henry Kissinger. However, the film sequences of each event were not as consistent--sometimes Mr. Rogers was shown after the President and sometimes Dr. Kissinger.

The most extensive coverage was given to the two Peking banquets. Chou's welcoming soiree was 10 minutes long, and the President's banquet lasted eight minutes. However, the shot sequences of the two events were so similar that if the greetings and flags had not been shown it would have been impossible to tell them apart. There was no lip-synchronized sound of the occasions; consequently, the commentator gave a summary of the toasts by Premier Chou and President Nixon. There was canned applause after each toast. At the welcoming dinner the applause for Chou's remarks corresponded to the length of film of people clapping. The applause for Mr. Nixon's toast was much shorter and did not last as long as the film of clapping guests. The national anthems were also prerecorded. They sounded the same each time, regardless of the composition of the band or orchestra, and they all ended abruptly on the same note.

The editing of the Chinese coverage was quite tight except in films of three places--the Peking opera, the sports exhibition, and the Shanghai industrial exhibit. The viewer got the impression that the presence of Chou and the President was secondary to the entertainment value of the event. The coverage of the Peking opera lasted six minutes and of the athletic exhibition eight minutes. The coverage of these events and of the ping pong and industrial exhibit in Shanghai was so long that a western viewer would begin to squirm in his seat. The reportage appeared to serve the dual purpose of informing about the President's trip and entertaining the viewer, and the extensive showing of Chinese industrial and consumer goods in Shanghai additionally underscored one facet of hopes for the results of the trip.

The Chinese played up a few events which did not get as full an airing on American television, and Secretary of State Rogers appeared more prominently to the Chinese people than he did at home: PRC television ran two sequences showing the Secretary in meeting with PRC Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fai and two sequences of the Secretary sightseeing around Peking. On the other hand, there was no special coverage of Dr. Kissinger's personal activities in China.

The coverage from the provinces--Hangchow and Shanghai--was less spectacular. Instead of separate sequences of each event, the Hangchow visit ran on from one place to another. The same was true

of the reportage from Shanghai. It is possible that the Chinese had problems getting the film back to Peking for processing and editing before broadcast time or simply that the visit to the provinces was not considered as politically significant. There was a small crowd at the Shanghai airport to see the Presidential party off, and the cameras did show the group of party officials smiling and waving vigorously--the first show of any "public" reaction.

Although there were no crowd shots at the Peking airport when the President arrived or departed, Premier Chou's return to Peking after seeing the President off was covered by a nine-minute TV news item showing a crowd of "more than 5,000" at the Peking airport. This coverage, in contrast to that of the airport ceremonies, was interspersed with numerous shots of the "cheering, flag-waving crowd."\*

From the reference point provided by American television coverage, it can be said that the Chinese did a solid job of informing their people about the Nixon visit. Except for the absence of live coverage of the banquets, the Chinese people got a generally straightforward picture of the visiting Americans. (Of course, the number of Chinese who were able to watch the coverage was probably limited, as compared with those having access to the mass radio and press media.)

Without a fuller frame of reference, any analysis of PRC television must be limited and qualified. The President's visit was, moreover, a one-of-a-kind event.\*\* Only when the analyst's backlog of information on TV behavior builds up will he be able to derive from film sequences the kind of meaningful comparisons he can draw on the basis of cumulative records of radio and press behavior. Take the hypothetical case of Chinese TV coverage of a visitor which includes no shots of the motorcade passing through Tien-an Men Square: The analyst could be on sure ground in ascribing significance to this omission only if he knew from the record that it was PRC TV's normal practice to show the Chinese people greeting visitors of a comparable level in the square.

The buildup of such a record is now just beginning. The payoff will come after Chinese television has been monitored systematically

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\*\* Peking radio, press, and TV media's handling of the event reflected the anomaly of a visit by the chief of state of a country with which the PRC does not have diplomatic relations. Comparisons of Peking media's handling of the President's arrival and activities with their handling of other high-level visits had to take account of that fact. For a discussion see page 1 of the 2 March [REDACTED] Special Memorandum reviewing foreign media reactions to the visit.

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over an extended period of time. The first benefits to the analyst have come from the audio and from an examination of such factors as sequence and juxtaposition of shots; this can be done easily and profitably in tandem with examination of the radio and press. For full exploitation of the new medium, the films must also be watched with the eye of one trained in the techniques of the cinematographer and film propagandist. For the way a film or television program is assembled--the type of shots, their duration and their sequence--can say as much as words printed in newspapers or aired on the radio.

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